

# The President's man in Bermuda

New US Consul General  
Gregory Slayton  
is making an impact in  
Bermuda by sticking  
up for the Island against  
knockers in Washington

**BY MATTHEW TAYLOR**  
**PHOTOGRAPHS BY DAVID SKINNER**

With his trademark baseball cap and medieval-style beard, new American Consul General Gregory Slayton is getting noticed in Bermuda. But while the visual motifs have raised his profile it is his behind-the-scenes work which Mr. Slayton hopes will leave a lasting legacy. Although mindful of his primary obligation to represent US interests and help the 8,000 Americans in the 63,000 mid-Atlantic British colony, he has already become quite an advocate for the Island, which has taken quite a bashing in certain sectors of Washington. It is a role that has seen him flying back to lobby everyone from State Department fixers to President George W. Bush who appointed him. Formerly a Democrat and supporter of Jimmy Carter, Mr. Slayton is now very much a Republican having served as co-chairman of the Silicon Valley Bush 2000 fundraising campaign. It was in that area of California that Mr. Slayton made his name as managing director of Slayton Capital, a venture capital outfit. And he sees likenesses between his old



stomping ground and his new environs. "It is a little similar to Silicon Valley in a lot of ways. The reason Silicon Valley is what it is, is because you had critical mass with entrepreneurs, venture capitalists, auditors and accountants in one place." It reminds him of the flourishing professional infrastructure that has made Bermuda a haven for international business. However, while he said many businessmen were being scared out of California because of high taxes, that is not something from which Bermuda suffers. "Bermuda has been very smart to have kept its tax programme well designed." That formula has attracted businesses and wealthy people, but also the wrath of politicians such as John Kerry, who made Bermuda-bashing part of his doomed Presidential election platform. While Mr. Kerry failed to get elected Bermuda still lives in fear that any two-line amendment to a bill somewhere in the American legislative framework could ultimately prove disastrous to its economic base. Mr. Slayton is well aware Bermuda has its detractors, however misguided. "In the



US, just like any country, certain people fall prey to mischaracterisation and caricatures. Take the last presidential election; the opponent tried to make a very significant issue out of exporting American jobs and capital. He even named Bermuda as one of the examples and lumped it together with a whole lot of other 'economic evils'. That was unfortunate, but the reality is, in politics that happens."

Mr. Slayton said he salutes the efforts of Bermuda Premier Alex Scott and leaders of both Bermuda's political parties in their attempt to get the true word out. "The Governor Sir John Vereker is helping in this as well. But in the absence of truth, non-truth can carry the day. What is critical for Bermuda is to get out the facts of the beneficial relationship with the United States and Bermuda. For example, approximately 25 percent of the pay-outs from Hurricane Katrina to US citizens and firms will come from Bermuda-based insurers and reinsurers. That's a number Bermudians can be proud of. It talks to the mutually beneficial relationship between our countries."

However, a large educational effort needed to be made to reinforce this message, he said. "If you compare Bermuda to virtually any small island economy it has done incredibly well."

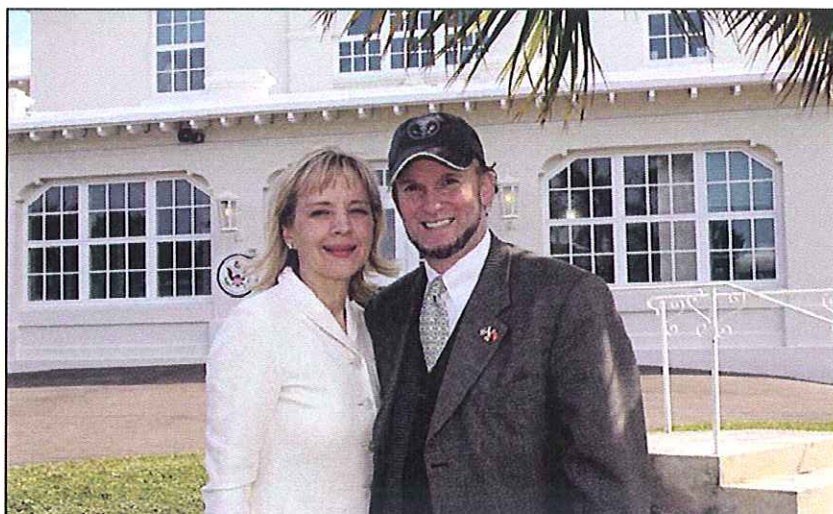
He has discussed Bermuda's plight with President Bush, but understandably is loath the impart details.

"There is some disinformation out there. Helping people understand all the great things Bermuda is and stands for is one of my jobs. As a result of that I have been back to DC three or four times in four months, every single time for senior level meetings at the State Department, White House, Congress, in which we are having these discussions.

"What I hear sometimes is: 'Bermuda is like the Cayman Islands, right? Lawless?' No, not at all."

He said the rule of law and handy proximity to the US are key factors that keep Bermuda in the forefront of international business.

However, tourism, the Island's other economic pillar, has suffered in recent years. Bermuda is right to try to re-brand its tourism sector, said Mr. Slayton. "I



was impressed by Tourism Minister Ewart Brown; he didn't try to mollycoddle or makes excuses. He said: 'We have a problem here and it's my job to work hard and well with other members of the tourism industry'.

"Does Bermuda even want to compete with the all-inclusive resorts in Jamaica where the average daily wage is a few bucks? I don't think Bermuda can or would want to compete." Mr. Slayton said 20 years ago Bermuda used to be the ideal vacation of every well-to-do East coast American. "It was on the radar screen of virtually everybody in that target market. Hats off to Minister Brown and his team, because he fully understands it. Bermuda again needs to understand what its competitive advantages are and really exploit those. The fact that Bermuda is only 90 minutes from Washington and a little further from other East coast cities is a huge advantage."

He said personal safety put Bermuda ahead of more dangerous rivals to the south and allowed it to cater to tourists who weren't only focused in grabbing a bargain.

"Personally, when I am asked, I say Bermuda is, for my money, by far the safest place in the Caribbean region, if you compare it to Nassau or Kingston. Generally it's a pretty safe place."

Bermuda would be wise to stick to what it is best at, is Mr. Slayton's key message. "A lot of countries say they want to get into the high tech sector. Countries have to be wise about their

competitive edge, about 'Where do we really do well?'

"Bermuda has done as well or better than any small island economy in the world by working out its competitive edge and utilising it." He is currently working on an initiative to help ensure Bermudian youngsters are skilled enough to take part in the economy.

During his busy opening few months in Bermuda he has got to know the key players in business, politics and education. He even hosted a breakfast attended by all the Island's high school principals.

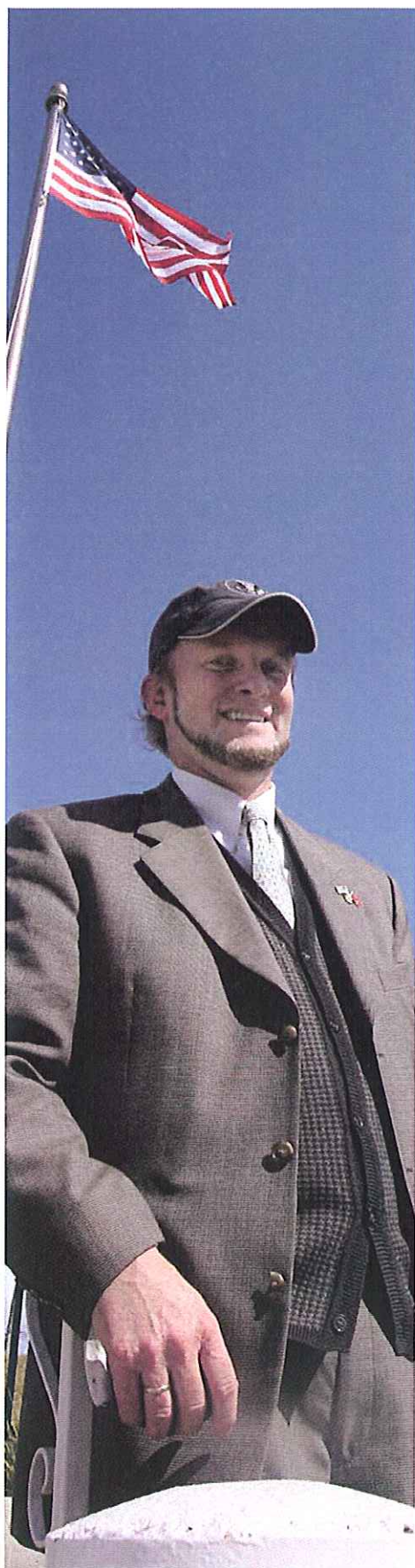
Mr. Slayton, who seems younger than his 46 years, said: "I dive into things. Either do a good job, or, why bother? Why fill the space? Let someone else come and do a great job."

He described his position as US Consul as "The greatest job I have ever had," and described the Bermuda posting is one of the best in the US State Department. "We have a noble mission here at the US Consulate and each one of us is honoured to be here. When I get up in the morning I am excited about this job."

This is the first time he has represented his country in a foreign land. "I have had a lot of good jobs, but I have never been a diplomat. However, I am probably 15 to 20 years younger than the average US diplomat."

Key to his task is improving Bermuda-US relations and he has been given a warm welcome by the Progressive Labour Party government as





well as the Opposition United Bermuda Party. "What's wonderful about Bermuda is people are warm and accepting."

However, the US and Bermuda are not as close as they have been in the past. "Senior Government leaders have described to me the state of relations between the US and Bermuda as experiencing 'a drift'. I think that has been fair to say. Part of the reason is there have been a number of CG's over the last five years. It's not been real productive to have a lot of changes." His predecessor, Denis Coleman, had a serious illness and spent a lot of time in the States.

Now, the new man is getting to grips with the job. "I was very pleased with the warm reception that we received. I come with a lot of humility, because there is a lot of stuff we can learn from our counterparts here.

"I believe there are very significant opportunities for the United States mission. I have had discussions with literally hundreds of Bermudians, and we have talked about the drift. The last guy in my position anybody seems to remember was Bob Farmer, and that was about ten years ago."

However, the ubiquitous baseball cap is helping Mr. Slayton get noticed. "I have a lot. It's kind of my brand. Some years ago a good friend of mine said I looked good in a baseball cap. I started wearing them around. Then, Michael Dell said, 'You must be the guy in the baseball cap', so I knew the brand was checking out."

In Mr. Slayton's office there is a picture of him shaking hands with President G. W. Bush wearing a tie and a baseball cap. "He is a really lovely man, really personable and really concerned about

our world and the threat of nuclear terrorists," said the US Consul.

Becoming a diplomat might seem an odd career choice for someone who had enjoyed such a vibrant business career, but the desire to help has been constant in his life. However, Mr. Slayton has the right credentials, including an impressive list of languages at his finger tips. He speaks French, Spanish, Philippino Tagalog and Wolof, which is the main language of Senegal. He spent a number of years working on projects to help the poor in Asia and Africa before illness forced him home. Mr. Slayton then earned an MBA from Harvard Business School and became an entrepreneur in Silicon Valley.

It is from the business angle that he now wants to help Bermuda. In the coming year he wants to promote greater exchange and is planning some "fairly significant initiatives" but is loathe to part with details yet.

It goes without saying that the large tracks of land still unused after American forces departed the Island more than a decade ago offer opportunities for partnership. "There are a number of American countries which expressed their interest in helping the Government turn them into viable productive housing stock and also clean up the environmental challenges. There are a number American companies that have made a substantial contribution to the US housing stock by actually taking former navy bases, funding them and turning them into middle class housing.

"Their experience could be beneficial."

[mtaylor@royalgazette.bm](mailto:mtaylor@royalgazette.bm)

**BL**

## SLAYTON IN BRIEF

He has lived on five continents, been a hugely successful businessman, managed micro-credit schemes that have helped people out of poverty in remote places and learned five languages.

His education included the study of economics at Dartmouth College in New Hampshire and, as a Fulbright Scholar, he gained a Masters in Asian Studies from the University of the Philippines. He is married to Marina and the couple have four children aged between four and 15. After enjoying a successful business career Mr. Slayton was appointed as Consul General to Bermuda where, on breaks from diplomacy he enjoys the sporting life, including tennis.